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ABSTRACT

Since the first case was identified in 1981, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has become the number one health concern across the nation. Previous research has shown that AIDS has not had an effect on the sexual behavior of sexually active college students. This study sought to further study the impact of AIDS on the sexual behavior of college students, and to attempt to identify the factors underlying its effect. Self-reported sexually active undergraduate college students (N=144) served as subjects. Subjects completed a one-page survey with questions assessing the subject's knowledge of AIDS, exposure to AIDS information, perception of AIDS vulnerability, changes in sexual behavior, specific sexual behavior(s) that had changed, and demographic factors. The results indicated that only one-third reported any change in their sexual behavior, and that even then the changes did not always involve a greater adherence to "safe sex" practices. The data further identified those subject characteristics predictive of a change in sexual behavior due to the AIDS crisis. These characteristics included being male, single, having received much exposure to AIDS information, and feeling vulnerable to AIDS infection. Findings suggest efforts to educate students about AIDS need to be accelerated, with greater emphasis upon the risk to women and the means of reducing exposure to the AIDS virus. (ABL)

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AIDS and Student Sexual Behavior: Who's Concerned, Who Isn't, and Why

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One hundred forty four college students participated in a survey on the impact of AIDS on their sexual behavior. The results indicated that only one-third reported any change in their sexual behavior, and that even then the changes did not always involve a greater adherance to "safe sex" practices. The data further identified those subject characteristics predictive of a change in sexual behavior due to the AIDS crisis.

Since the first case was identified in 1981, AIDS has become the number one health concern across the nation (Clark, et al., 1985; Dienstbier, 1987; "Many fear high AIDS mortality", 1987). Although there has been extensive media coverage of AIDS and the modes of transmitting the AIDS virus, and while the concern of contracting AIDS has had a significant impact on the sexual behavior of homosexuals, the evidence for heterosexuals is mixed (Bruno, et al., 1985; "Knowledge about AIDS poor", 1987). Simkins and Eberhages's (1984) study showed that 70% of the subjects surveyed expressed little concern about AIDS and reported no change in their sexual behavior. More recently, the results from an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll indicated that 92% of the population said AIDS had no effect on their sexual behavior (Smilgis, et al. (1987). This was found to be particularly true among sexually active college students (Hirschorn, 1987). While cognizant of AIDS, most do not perceive it to be a personal threat. This finding is

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particularly disturbing since there has been about 700 cases of AIDS among college students (McAuliffe, et al., 1987).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to further study AIDS' impact on the sexual behavior of college students, and to attempt to identify the factors underlying its effect.

Method

Subjects

One hundred forty four (88 female) self-reported sexually active volunteers were surveyed. All subjects were undergraduates enrolled in Psychology and Sociology courses at a Midwestern state college.

Materials and Procedure

The subjects completed a one page survey. It consisted of questions assessing the subject's knowledge of AIDS, exposure to AIDS information, perception of AIDS vulnerability, changes in sexual behavior, specific sexual behavior(s) that had changed, and demographic factors. The list of specific sexual behaviors included condom use, abstinence, restricting the number of partners, more selectivity in the choice of partners, anal sex, oral sex, and homosexuality.

Results

The effect of subject age, sex, marital status, exposure to AIDS information, and perception of AIDS vulnerability on changes in sexual behavior was analyzed using a logistic regression analysis (LOGIT) technique (Maddala, 1983). The LOGIT regression model was found to be significant, X^2 (10)=80.53, $p<.001$. The independent variable derivative table indicated that the probability of responding that AIDS information had some effect on sexual behavior increased if the subject was male (13% increase), single

(29% increase), had received much exposure to AIDS information (26% increase), and felt vulnerable to AIDS infection (25% increase). It should be noted, however, that 66% of the subjects reported that there had been no changes in their sexual activity. This data is presented in Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Insert Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 about here

Self reports of specific sexual behaviors were also analyzed. Chi-square analyses indicated that subjects reporting a change in sexual behavior were significantly more likely than those reporting no change to have decreased all behaviors except homosexuality and oral sex. This data is presented in Figure 6. Among subjects reporting a change, the only significant finding (X^2 (1)=8.81, p=.003) was that subjects reporting much effect on sexual behavior were more likely to abstain from sex than were subjects reporting some effect on sexual behavior. This data is presented in Figure 7. There was no significant difference between these subjects on the number of behaviors that they were changing (much effect, M=2.00; some effect, M=1.53).

Insert Figures 6 and 7 about here

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that AIDS has had limited impact on the sexual behavior of college students. Fully two-thirds of the subjects reported that AIDS has had no impact on their sexual behavior. Only single

males who have received much exposure to AIDS information and who feel personally threatened by AIDS were likely to have changed their behavior. Even then, the changes tended to be highly individualistic and not always reflective of practices defined as "safe sex." These findings suggest that efforts to educate students about AIDS need to be accelerated, with greater emphasis placed upon the risk to women and the means of reducing exposure to the AIDS virus.

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Figure 1

The Effect of AIDS on Student Sexual Behavior

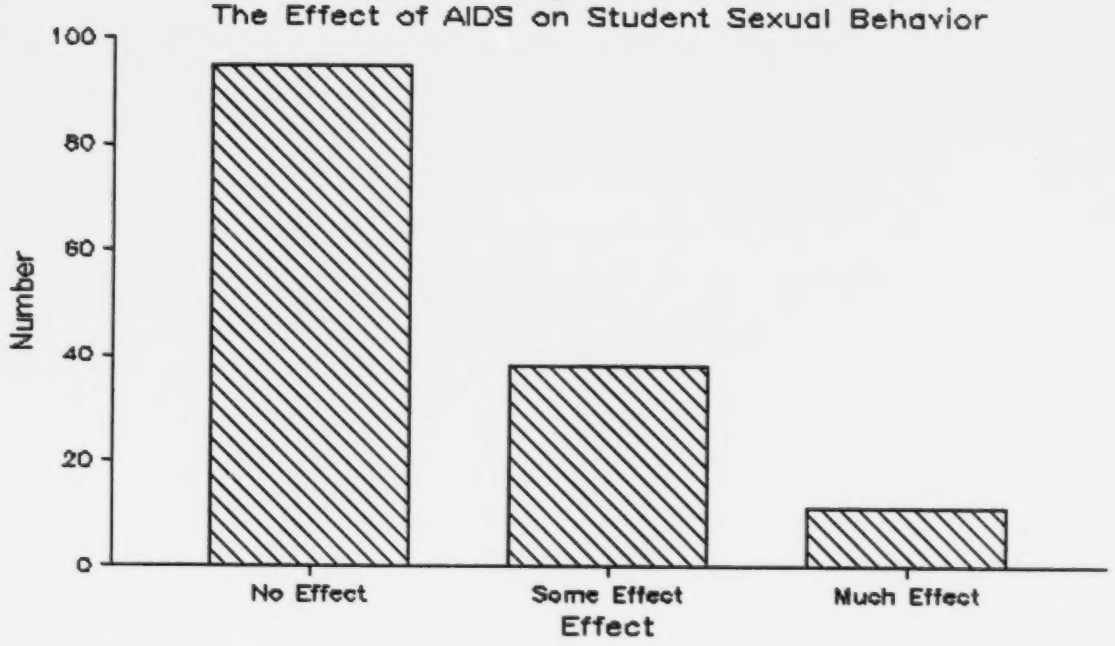


Figure 2

The Effect of Sex on Student Sexual Behavior

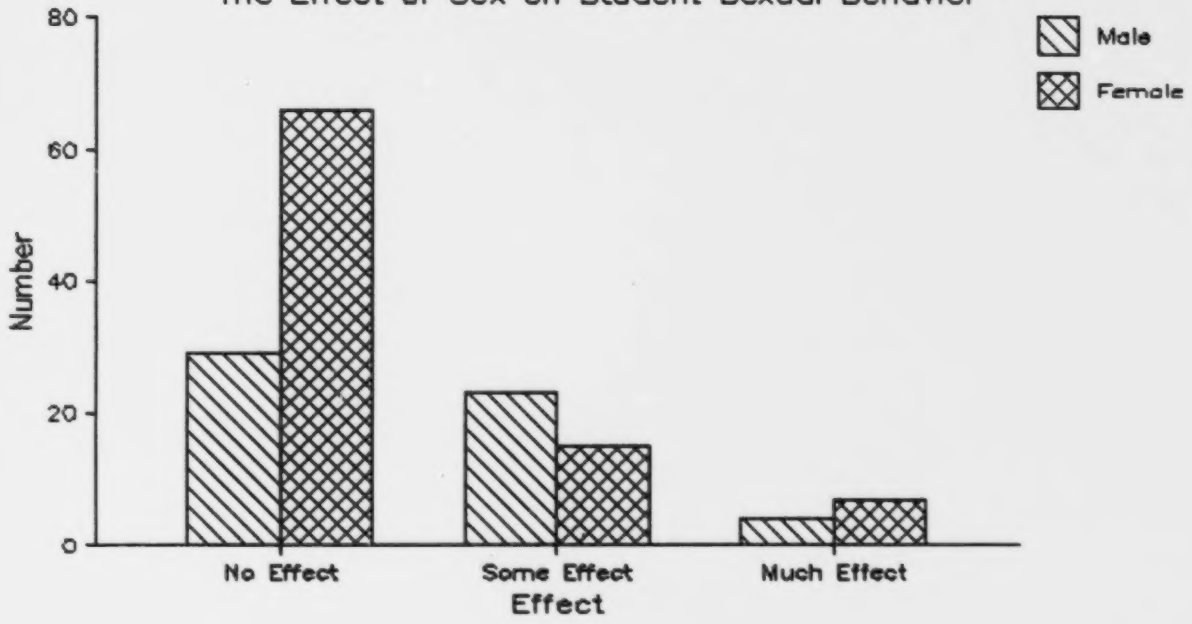


Figure 3

The Effect of Marital Status on Student Sexual Behavior

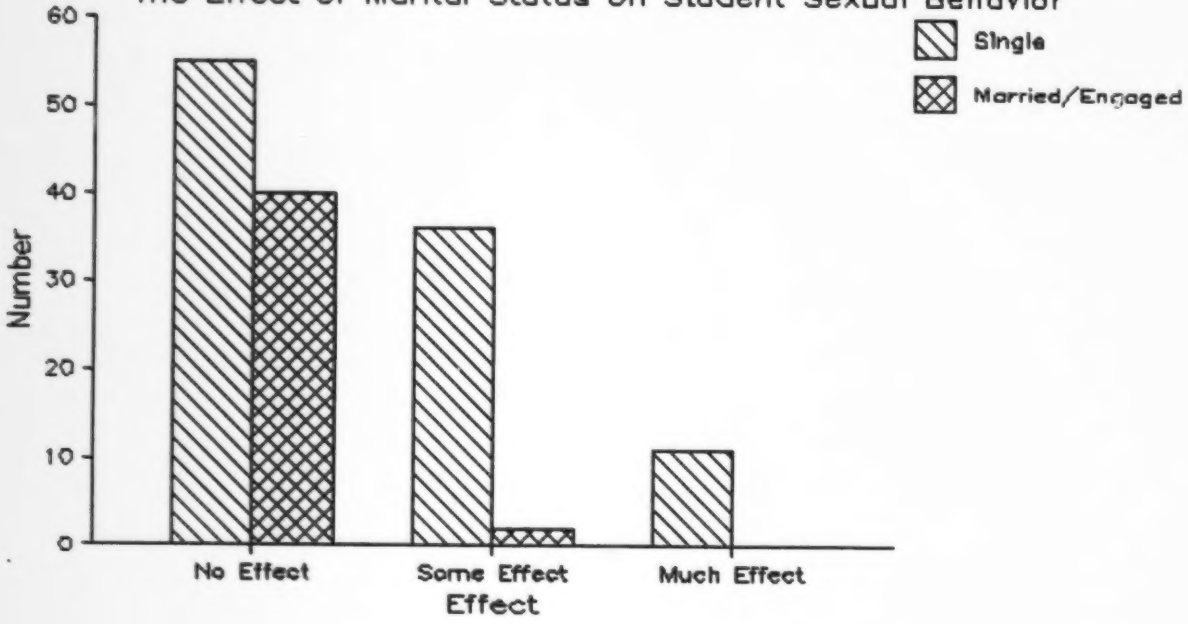


Figure 4

The Effect of AIDS Information Exposure on Student Sexual Behavior

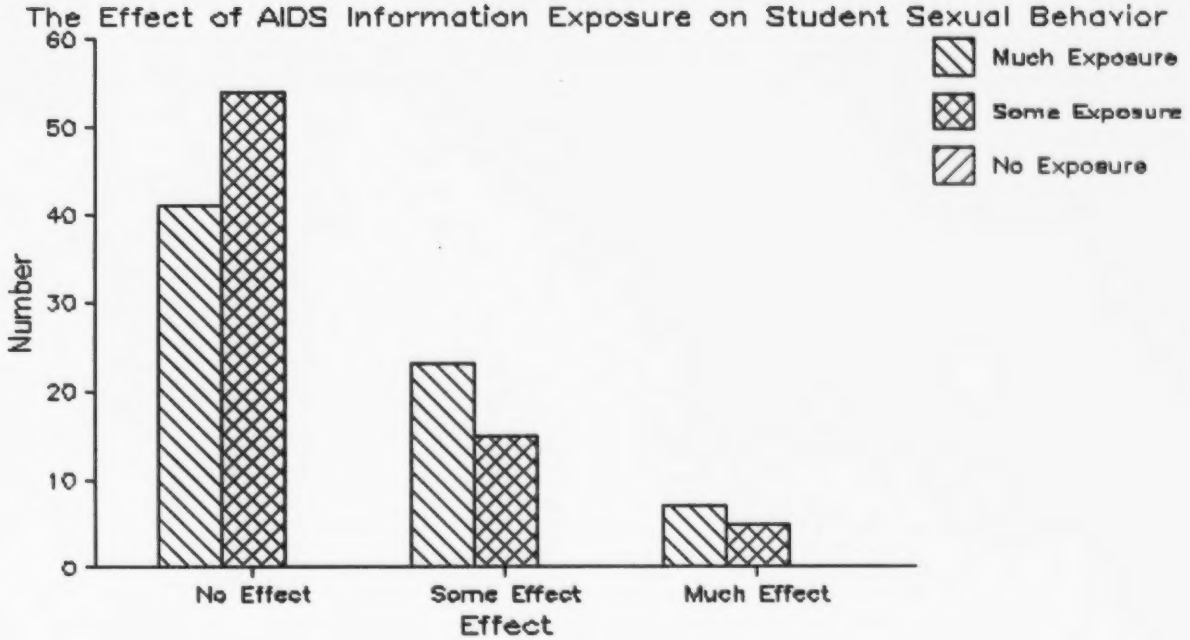


Figure 5

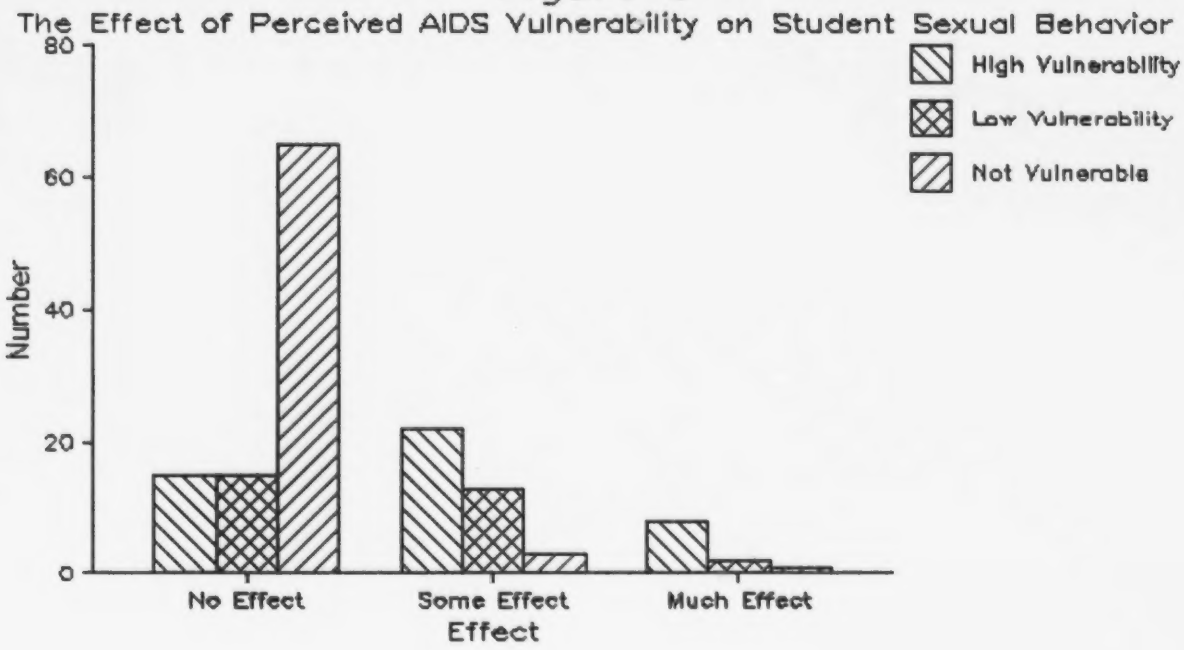

The Effect of Perceived AIDS Vulnerability on Student Sexual Behavior
High Vulnerability
Low Vulnerability
Not Vulnerable
Number
80
60
40
20
0
No Effect
Some Effect
Much Effect
Effect

Figure 6

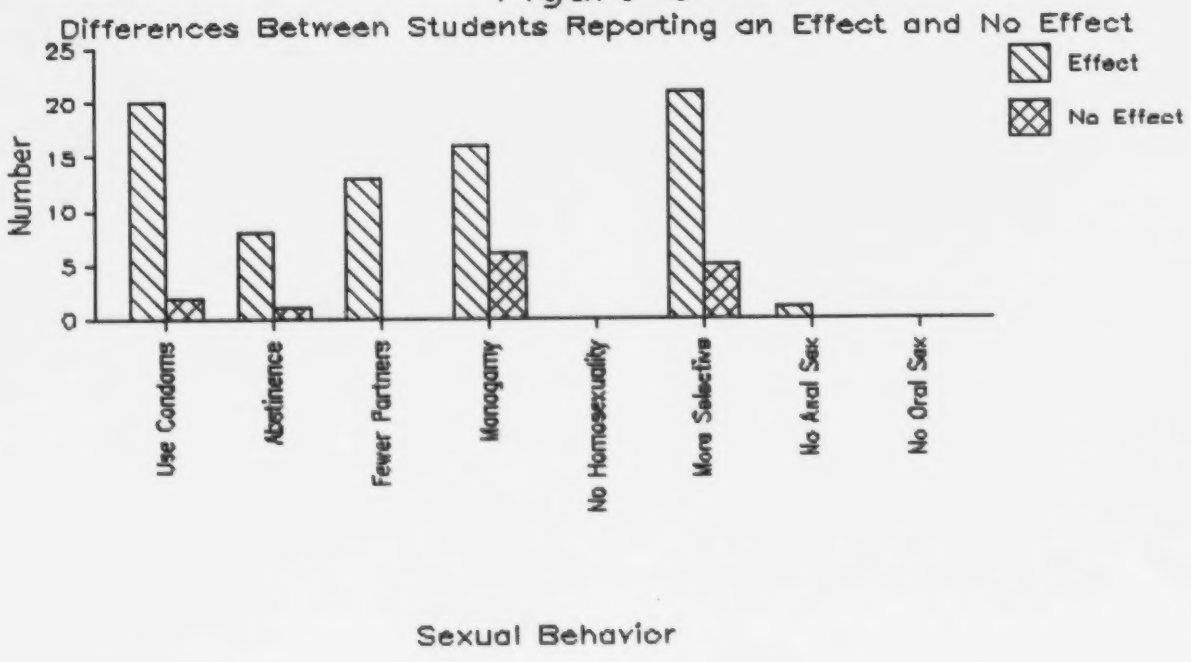
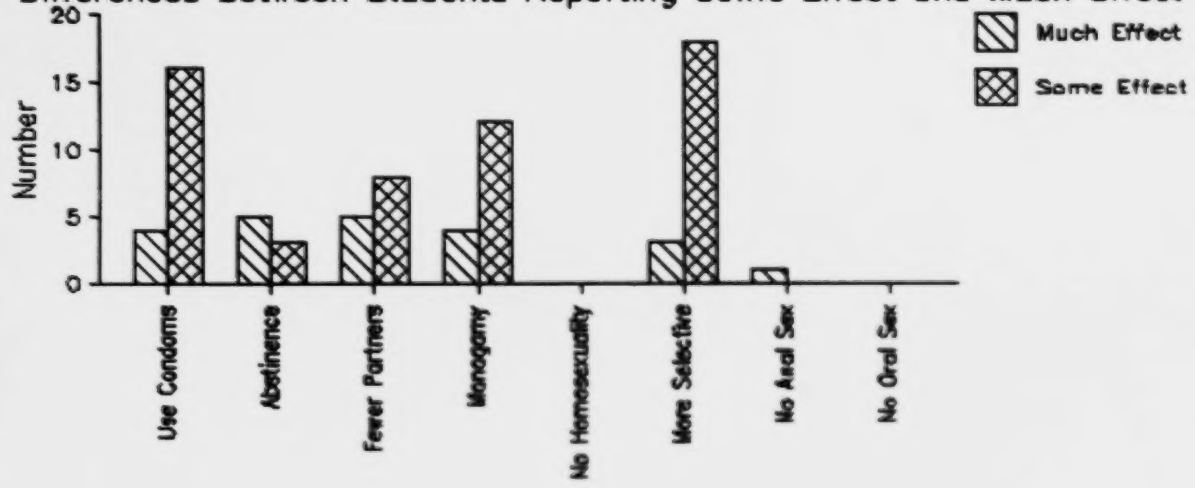

Differences Between Students Reporting an Effect and No Effect
Effect
No Effect
Number
25
20
15
10
5
0
Use Condoms
Abstinence
Fewer Partners
Monogamy
No Homosexuality
More Selective
No Anal Sex
No Oral Sex
Sexual Behavior

Figure 7

Differences Between Students Reporting Some Effect and Much Effect



Sexual Behavior